First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest

Officers Retreat

May 18-19, 1990

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SESSION THREE

{ CONFIDENCE
Shirley and Harvey }

Open with

~~Scripture:~~ ~~John 10:1-10~~

Shirely Valentine, page 27

British, housewife, mother of 2 grown children,

husband - Joe

-talks to wall - empty life...no passion

friend takes her to Greece

she has always fantasized about drinking wine in

land where grape is grown...

finally makes it - see page 27

Religion has to do with living abundantly - fully -

passionately - joyfully — Jn 10:10

An expanded, not contracted life...

Part of the reason - we don't, is, like

Shirley, we don't think there is much in ourselves - valuable, adequate and part of the reason is that no one ever helped us see our own value - in fact, many pointed out the reverse

Harvey Cox, professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School, who has written a number of fine books on theology and culture, wrote a short memoir a few years ago about his personal faith experience under the title, "Just As I Am." Cox, whose theology is broad, liberal, full of life and has a passion for peace and justice in the world, grew up in a small conservative Baptist Church in Pennsylvania. He recalls that church with fondness and respect and remembers singing the old gospel hymn, "Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me."

And then this distinguished intellectual recalls those hazardous days. He wasn't very good at sports, there were better musicians in the band, the girls preferred other fellows. He wasn't the

smartest, and although he was sure his parents loved him, he was not at all sure he would ever live up to their expectations.

"But God accepted me just as I am"

"That was not judgment but good news. Years later, when I read Paul Tillich's famous sermon, 'You are Accepted,' I knew exactly what it meant, and I could hear the meoldy of the old hymn still humming on in the back of my mind." [Just As I Am, p. 151-152]

Bible Study - David story.

more on making O. T. story framework for our journey - this time focusing on a particular character: DAVID

Set scene

Israel conquers, settles, Judges - tribal society..

Want a King

Saul - wins - loses God's confidence-

Samuel anoints

mantel passes to David...

remarkable leader

consolidates forces, tribes

takes Jerusalem

Builds nation

interesting character -

Bathsheba - Uriah - Nathan

son dies

later internal revolt -

Absalom betrays - is killed by his own troops

Absolom, oh Absolom!

Let's look at how David is chosen

back to I Samuel 16 (read it)

Eliab - has what it takes -

nothing about David commends him but God sees heart

i. e. potential...

David is handsome but that isn't the point -

he isn't King because of looks

God sees potential

deeper point is grace.

God's love not based on our productivity...

God sees potential in us, where there is no evidence

We know the psychology of grace

Babies - thrive and live -

or die without grace.

weight gain, sleep - if caressed

Cocaine babies - held and caressed -

we enable children to love by loving them.

In our most intimate relationships we know that if everybody is keeping score - we're in trouble.

someone has to love - with grace. When there is conflict in intimate relations

Urban crisis - murder for shoes

Clarence Page Editorial:

And we know about it in social terms

"Poverty alone does not lead into crime. But those who think they have no money or no power undoubtedly have a tough time feeling good about themselves in a society that places so much value on money and power.

"The resulting lack of self-esteem can result in self-destruction, including drugs, crime, street gangs or other hazardous temptations that rush in to fill the self-worth vacuum....

"That might begin to explain," says Page, "why young men in Harlem have a higher death rate than their counterparts in Bangladesh." [Chicago Tribune, 3/21/90]

When there is no grace in the system, when the traditional source of grace - namely stable, loving and accessible families - do not exist and where secondary sources of grace - well funded, safe and effective schools, and social services, even churches - are not visible, accessible or don't exist, then we should not be surprised at not only the inability to love, but the inability to

care and the consequent absence of value about life - any life.

We live in a state of grace - or we aren't living much.

In the journey of life there have been people for most of us, who had confidence in us: who saw something in us no one else could see; saw something in us we ourselves didn't know was there, had trouble believing was there. We have been blessed, most of us, by people along the way who in one way or another said "yes" to us, had confidence in us and their confidence had a powerful effect. Almost in spite of ourselves we began to experience a little self-confidence, a little self-esteem. If the teacher thinks I can do it, maybe I can - maybe I can play the solo, memorize the lines, hit the ball, run for president. She thinks I can do this: thinks I could write poetry, do trigonometry, become an astronaut or a neurosurgeon... Maybe there is something here pretty important, at least potentially important. They are our saints - those

cheerleaders who urged us on, and whose graceful confidence in us gave us confidence in ourselves.

We are blessed by them along the way. We are blessed by them still. And the astonishing assertion of Christianity is that even if you are not blessed by people who love and accept you and see potential in you and have confidence in you: even if you never have been blessed, there is one who loves you and accepts you and knows everything about you - all your flaws and failures and frailties - and still loves you, still sees your potential, still has confidence in you.

One of the great ironies is that the religion whose purpose it is to announce this good news is often better at reminding us of our shortcomings than reminding us of our value: more eloquent in describing our sin than our potential: more effective in making us feel guilty than giving us confidence for the journey.

The great tragedy is that the Gospel is presented as a courtroom drama and we are on trial

- rather than a reunion with the one who loves us unconditionally.

To the psychology of grace, the relationship of grace, the politics of grace - we add the grace of Jesus Christ which says that the one who created you loves you and accepts you and there is nothing you have ever done - or can do - that will change that love and that acceptance.

Oh, you can hide from it. You can ignore it. You can choose to argue with it and about it. You can doubt it, disbelieve it and deny it. But you cannot change it. You can live as if you don't matter to anyone, but it isn't true because you do matter to someone. You can live as if your life has no value, but it isn't true. Your life is valuable to God.

David, back on the very edges of history, was one of the first to learn it. He was also a poet and although we cannot know for certain that he actually wrote Psalms, many of them are attributed to him, including the most beloved of them all,

titled "A Psalm of David"...

And I like to think that the opening words:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."

have something to do with that day he remembered all his life, when he was out keeping his father's sheep and old Samuel looked him in the eye, this non-descript wisp of a boy, and said - "This is the one."

And I like to think that all his life, on the day his baby died, the day he had to hide from his own troops, the day they told him his beloved son was dead - that David remembered that there was one who loved him and cared about him and had confidence in him.

And I like to remember that 1,000 years later, when Jesus, who had made the blind see, and the lame walk, and the oppressed and beaten down, the unlovely and unloved, stand up straight and tall... when he came riding into the city of David ~~Jerusalem~~ one day, the crowds that came out to meet

him said, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

And I like to think that as he faced that Holy Week with high intentionality and incredible bravery... and as he died an almost intentional death, alone, that there was a strong confidence which came from his own faith that God's love for him was boundless.

And so, I like to think it is and will be for each of us.

"Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see."

Amen.

Journal -

Inventory of Grace

My Saints -

Those who saw more in me than I saw of myself.

Those who communicated Gospel to me...

Discuss (3's)

Copies of "Amazing Grace"